

Keeping Watch
Ezekiel 33:1-3; Psalm 23: John 10:11-14
Fourth Sunday of Easter, (May 11) 2025
Good Shepherd Sunday
Deacon Ordination
Kyle Childress

This morning we are ordaining four deacons: Jerry Williams, Michelle Williams, Deidra Harrison, and Jaime Bouldin. The word deacon can be translated as “servant” which is what the first deacons did in the Book of Acts chapter 6. Actually, and literally, the first seven deacons “waited on tables” as they served Greek-speaking widows who were being left out of proper food distribution. The Apostles were focused on preaching and teaching, while the church created and called deacons to keep up with the care of church members.

But on this Good Shepherd Sunday I want to quickly call our attention to an overlooked role of deacons and pastors, those of us ordained and called to be shepherds of the flock, and sometimes called “under-shepherds” since we are all under the leadership and care of the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ.

In chapters 33 and 34, the prophet Ezekiel calls to task the shepherds of Israel, who have failed miserably caring for the flock, caring for the community. Ezekiel says, “You don’t feed the sheep. You don’t build up the weak ones, don’t heal the sick, don’t doctor the injured, don’t go after the strays, don’t look for the lost. You bully and badger them. And now they’re scattered every which way because there was no shepherd—scattered and easy pickings for wolves and coyotes” (Ezek. 34:5-6).

Just before this, Ezekiel reminds Israel that part of the job is to be sentinels, to be a watcher of the flock, looking out for the safety of the sheep, protecting them from wolves and coyotes. And when danger is near, they are to blow trumpets and warn the flock, the community.

This is what shepherds do: they care for the flock, feed the flock, lead the flock beside still waters, but they also are always looking for threats to the flock.

I recently looked up on YouTube the old 1960's Looney Tunes cartoons of the Wile E. Coyote, aka Ralph Wolf, trying to steal sheep from the flock watched over by Sam Sheepdog. Every morning, the two of them matter-of-factly punch the timeclock, and speak to each other, "Morning Ralph." "Morning Sam." For the rest of the day, Ralph the Wolf tries every trick he can imagine to steal sheep while Sam the unruffled sheepdog thwarts him every time. At the end of the day, they punch out on the timeclock, and calmly, casually say, "See you Sam," and "Better luck next time, Ralph."

This morning, we are ordaining you to become Sam Sheepdogs. I am suggesting that we're living in a time when all of us called and ordained to be shepherds need to recover the sense that we are sentinels, looking out for danger to the community called Austin Heights Church, while helping train the entire congregation that we are interconnected and are to look out for one another. We are each other's shepherds keeping watch for every threat.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd, directly answering Ezekiel. So, when we say with the Psalmist, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me. Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me." We can trust that Jesus Christ is with us. But we also know that you shepherds, you deacons, are with us, too.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. One True God,
Mother of us all. Amen.